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L E T T E R

T O

The Rev. Mr. JOHN PALMER,

IN DEFENCE OF THE

Illustrations of Philosophical Necessity.

B Y

JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S.

Respecting Man, whatever wrong we call  
May, must be right, as relative to all.

POPE.

BATH: PRINTED BY R. CRUTTWELL;

AND SOLD BY

J. JOHNSON, No. 72, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD, LONDON.

MDCCLXXIX.

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Price One Shilling and Six-Pence.

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## E R R A T A.

Page 4, line 8, for *presented* read *present*.

P. 33 l. 14, for *scriptures* read *scripture*.

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JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S.

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[ I ]  
it is of the greatest importance, and now in  
a work of considerable extent, you continue  
your observations to it.  
Your publication has also been a work of  
great expectation among our common friends  
who were anxious to see your opinions  
on your own account, in your previous work  
have been composed more than a year ago.  
In this time it has been submitted to the  
perusal of persons of great talents and  
worth, who I am informed, think highly of  
it, and have recommended the publication.

To the Rev. Mr. PALMER.

DEAR SIR,

NOTWITHSTANDING my unwilling-  
ness to engage any farther in metaphy-  
sical controversy, there are some circumstan-  
ces attending your *Observations on my Treatise  
on Philosophical Necessity*, that make me in  
this case less averse to it. You are an old  
acquaintance, whom I respect, and whom I  
believe to be actuated by the best views; you  
are thought to be a master of this subject,  
and have certainly given very particular at-  
tention to it; thinking, as I myself do, that

B

it



it is of the greatest importance ; and now, in a work of considerable extent, you confine your observations to it.

Your publication has also been a work of great expectation among our common friends, who were apprized of your intentions. By your own account, in your Preface, it must have been composed more than a year ago. In this time it has been submitted to the perusal of persons of great learning and worth, who, I am informed, think highly of it, and have recommended the publication, not only as excellent in itself, but as very proper to follow that of Dr. Price, who was thought by them to have been too tender of me, in our amicable discussion, and to have made some imprudent concessions. Your work, it is thought, will supply the deficiency in his.

You had the generosity to propose submitting your work to my own private perusal ; and though, for reasons of delicacy and propriety,



priety, I thought proper to decline it, I encouraged you in your design of publication. Also, though I did not, I believe, make you any particular promise, you will probably expect that, all things considered, I shall give you an answer. I therefore do it, and with the same freedom with which you yourself have written. But, I shall confine myself chiefly to the discussion of those points on which the real *merits of the question* turn, without replying at large to what you have advanced with respect to the *consequences* of the doctrine. Indeed, if the doctrine itself be true, we must take all the genuine consequences, whether we relish them or not. I proceed, therefore, to a state of the controversy between us, and the consideration of the nature and weight of what you urge with respect to it.

The principal argument for the doctrine of Necessity is briefly this: If, in two precisely equal situations of mind, with respect both to disposition and motives, two different deter-

minations of the will be possible, one of them must be an effect without a cause. Consequently, only one of them is possible.

Now all that the ingenuity of man can reply to this is, either that, though the determination be uncertain, or contingent (depending neither upon the previous disposition of mind, nor the motives presented to it) it will still, on some account or other, not properly be *an effect without a cause*. For that there can be any effect without a cause, no advocate for the doctrine of liberty has, I believe, ever asserted. Or, in the next place, it may be said, that the above is not a fair stating of the question in debate; for that the determinations may be invariably the same in the same circumstances, being agreeable to some constant law or rule, and yet, not being *necessarily* so, the necessarian, in fact, gains no advantage by the concession.

You, Sir, have combated the necessarians on both these grounds; maintaining that whatever

ever be the state of mind, or the motives present to it, it has within itself a power of determining without any regard to them, the *self-determining power* being itself the proper *cause* of the determination. You likewise assert that, though there should be the greatest *certainty* in all the determinations of the will, yet because it is not a *physical*, but only a *moral certainty*, it is not a proper *necessity*. I shall consider distinctly what you have advanced on both these views of the subject, in the order in which I have mentioned them.



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SECTION I.

*Of the Argument for the Doctrine of Necessity  
from the Consideration of the Nature of Cause  
and Effect.*

“IN the very same circumstances,” you say,  
p. 17, “in which the choice or deter-  
“ mination was directed to one object of pur-  
“ suit, it might have brought itself to will, or  
“ determine on the pursuit of a different, or  
“ contrary one. In other words, the mind  
“ is free to deliberate upon, and, in conse-  
“ quence of this, to chuse, and determine the  
“ motives of its conduct.”

This state of the case, I would observe in  
the first place, evidently implies that the mind  
cannot determine itself without some motive;  
but you think that, because it is capable of  
deliberating



*deliberating* upon motives, it can chuse what motive it will be determined by. But if the mind cannot finally determine without a motive, neither, surely, can it *deliberate*, that is, *determine to deliberate*, without a motive. Because the volition to deliberate cannot be of a different nature from the volition that is consequent to the deliberation. A volition, or a decision of the mind, by whatever name it be denominated, or whatever be its nature, must be one and the same thing. It must, in all cases, be subject to the same rule, if it be subject to rule, or else be equally subject to no rule at all. You had better, therefore, say at once, that every determination of the mind, even the final one, may proceed on no motive at all. And your next retreat will equally serve you here: for you still maintain that, though there be nothing, either in the disposition of mind, or the motives present to it, that was at all the cause of the determination, it will not be an effect without a cause, because the self-determining power is, itself, a proper and adequate cause.

“ There remains a proper cause,” you say,  
“ p. 24, a sufficient and adequate cause, for  
“ every volition or determination which is  
“ formed. This cause is that self-determin-  
“ ing power, which is essential to agency, and  
“ in the exercise of which motion begins.”  
Again, p. 36, “ One principle of freedom in  
“ the human mind will sufficiently account  
“ for all their actions, and to seek after other  
“ causes, must, therefore, in his own way of  
“ reasoning, be wholly unnecessary.”

Now to every thing that can be advanced  
to this purpose, I think I have given a satis-  
factory reply in the *additional illustrations*,  
printed in my *Correspondence with Dr. Price*,  
p. 288, in which I shew that the self-deter-  
mining power, bearing an equal relation to  
any two different decisions, cannot be said to  
be a proper and adequate cause with respect  
to them both. But this section, I suppose,  
you must have overlooked, otherwise you  
could not but have thought it peculiarly ne-  
cessary to reply to my observations on that  
subject,

subject, which so very materially affect your argument. I must, therefore, take the liberty to request that you would consider it, and reply to it.

To argue as you do here, in any other case, would be thought very extraordinary. If I ask the cause of what is called the *wind*, it is a sufficient answer to say, in the first instance, that it is caused by the motion of the air, and this by its partial rarefaction, &c. &c. &c.; but if I ask why it blows *north* rather than *south*, will it be sufficient to say that, *this* is caused by the motion of the air? The motion of the air being equally concerned in north and south winds, can never be deemed an adequate cause of one of them in preference to the other.

In like manner, the self-determining power, allowing that man has such a thing, and that it may be the cause of determining in general, can never be deemed a sufficient cause of any one particular determination, in preference to another.



another. Supposing, therefore, two determinations to be possible, and there be nothing but the mere self-determining power to decide between them, the disposition of mind and motives being all exactly equal, one of them must want a proper cause, just as much as the north or the south wind would be without a proper cause, if nothing could be assigned but the motion of the air in general, without something to determine why it should move this way rather than that.

Besides, abstractedly and strictly speaking, no *mere power* can ever be said to be an adequate cause of its own acts. It is true that no effect can be produced without a power capable of producing it; but power, universally, requires both *objects* and proper *circumstances*. What, for instance, can be done with a *power of burning*, without something to burn, and this being placed within its sphere of action? What is a *power of thinking*, or *judging*, without ideas, or objects, to think and form a judgment upon? What, therefore,



fore, can be done with a power of *willing*, without something to call it forth? and it is impossible to state any case in which it can be *called forth*, without implying such *circumstances*, as will come under the description of *motives*, or *reasons* for its being exerted one way rather than another, exactly similar to any other power, that is, *power universally and abstractedly considered*, corporeal or intellectual, &c. &c. &c.

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## SECTION II.

*How far the Arguments for the Doctrine of Necessity are affected by the Consideration of the Soul being material or immaterial.*

**B**UT you have another resource besides that which I have considered in the preceding section; which is, that though it be true that, supposing the soul to be *material*, and subject to physical laws, every determination requires a foreign cause, yet if the soul be *im-*  
*material,*

*material*, no such cause is necessary. It may then determine itself in whatever manner it pleases.

“ The whole of it” (viz. the section concerning the argument from cause and effect) you say, p. 20, “supposes a similarity in the  
“ constituent principles of matter and spirit;  
“ for by those only who confess that similarity, will it be acknowledged that the same  
“ general maxims will apply, both to effects  
“ mechanically produced, and those which  
“ depend upon will and choice.” Again, you say, p. 22, “To a principle of thought conceived to be material, a change of circumstances may be essential to a difference of  
“ volition; but when the mind is considered  
“ as being in its own nature immaterial, and  
“ therefore not subject to the laws of matter,  
“ but as endued with a self-determining power, a variety of volition or determination  
“ in the same situation or circumstances may  
“ be admitted as possible, without any contradiction, or seeming difficulty at all.”

Now

Now I really cannot conceive that the contradiction is at all the less glaring, or the difficulty more surmountable, on the hypothesis of the mind being immaterial. It does, indeed, follow that the mind, being immaterial, is not subject to the laws of matter; but it does not, therefore, follow that it is subject to *no laws at all*, and consequently has a self-determining power, independent of all laws, or rule of its determinations. In fact, there is the very same reason to conclude that the mind is subject to laws as the body. *Perception, judgment, and the passions*, you allow to be so, why then should the *will* be exempt from all law? Do not perception, judgment, and the passions, belong to the mind, just as much as the will; yet, notwithstanding this, it is only in certain cases that the powers of perception, judgment, or the passions, can be exerted. Admitting the mind, therefore, to be immaterial, it may only be in certain cases that a determination of the will can take place. You must find some other substance to which the will is to be ascribed, entirely different from  
that



that in which perception and judgment inhere, before you can conclude that its affections and acts are not invariable, and even necessary.

Besides, according to all *appearances*, from which alone we can be authorized to conclude any thing, the decisions of the will as invariably follow the disposition of mind, and the motives, as the perception follows the presentation of a proper object, or the judgment follows the perceived agreement or disagreement of two ideas. This, at least, is asserted by necessarians, and it does not depend upon the mind being material or immaterial whether the observation be just or not. If it be invalidated, it must be on some other ground than this. I am willing, however, to follow you through all that you alledge in support of this argument.

“Moral necessity,” you say, p. 45, “arises  
“from the influence of motives; which, as  
“they are not physical beings or substances,  
“cannot possibly act as one physical being  
“or



“ or substance does upon another.” Again, p. 82, “ where there is the greatest certainty, “ or necessity of a moral kind, there is always “ a possibility of a different choice.” And, p. 46, “ In the strict philosophical sense, no- “ thing can be necessary, which is not phy- “ sically so, or which it would not be a con- “ tradiction to the nature of things to suppose “ not to be, or to be otherwise than it “ is. Now this kind of necessity we clearly “ perceive in the case of one body acting upon “ another, and giving motion to it. But do “ arguments and motives bear the same phy- “ sical relation to the determinations of the “ mind ?”

I own I am rather surprized at the confidence with which you urge this argument, when it is maintained, and insisted on by necessarians, that arguments and motives *do* bear as *strict* a relation (call it physical or moral, or by whatever name you please) to determinations of the mind, as any other causes in nature to their proper effects ; because, according to  
manifest

manifest appearances, the determinations of the will do, in fact, as certainly follow the apprehension of arguments and motives, as any one thing is ever observed to follow another in the whole course of nature; and it is just as much a contradiction to suppose the contrary in the one case as in the other, that is, a contradiction to the known and observed laws of nature; so that they must have been otherwise than they are now established, if any thing else should follow in those cases. No other kind of contradiction would follow in any case.

You say, however, p. 43, “ Physical necessity is a necessity arising out of the nature of things, and immediately depending upon it; so that while things remain to be what they are, it would be a contradiction to suppose, that the consequences flowing from this kind of necessity can be different from those which do actually result from it. To say that any thing is necessary, in this sense, is the same as saying that it is a natural impossibility

“ impossibility for it not to be, or to be different from what it is.”<sup>1</sup> And, p. 44, you say, “ The fall of a stone is the necessary effect of that law of gravity which is impressed upon it.”

Now I do maintain, and all appearances will justify me in it, that a determination of the mind according to motives is, using your own words, that which arises from the very nature of the mind, and immediately dependent upon it; so that the mind remaining what it is, and motives what they are, it would be a contradiction to suppose that they should be different from what they are in the same circumstances. The parallel between material and immaterial natures is here most strict, and the inference the very same in the one case as in the other. If the fall of a stone be the necessary effect of gravity impressed upon it, or upon *body*, in the very *same sense* (because for the very *same reason*) the determination of the will is the necessary effect of the laws impressed upon it,

C

or



or upon *mind*. This conclusion is as much grounded on facts and appearances as the other.

Nay, beginning with *mind*, I might, according to your mode of reasoning, say first, that, according to all appearances, the mind is necessarily determined by motives, for every thing we see in human nature confirms it. Mind is, therefore, subject to fixed laws, but matter is a thing totally different from mind. It cannot, therefore (whatever appearances may be) resemble mind in this, or any other respect, and consequently must be free from all fixed laws whatever. Thus might your own arguments be retorted upon you, and bring you to an evident absurdity; but, in my opinion, not a greater absurdity, or more contrary to fact, than that the mind is free from all fixed laws, and endued with a power of self-determination.

I wish, however, you would explain in what sense it would be a *contradiction* for a stone

stone not to fall to the ground. It is only from the observation of the *fact* that we find it does tend to the ground. *A priori*, it would have been just as probable that it might have tended to recede from the ground, and to rise upwards. Where also would be the contradiction, in any proper sense of the word, if acids did not unite with alkalies, or if water should take fire and burn, like spirit of wine? No person, I presume, is sufficiently acquainted with the nature of things, to pronounce, that there would be any thing that could be called a *contradiction* in results the very opposite of what we see do take place.

That which approaches the nearest to a properly necessary effect, is *the receding of bodies after impulse*, which you also maintain. But, though you say you *clearly perceive* this necessity, even this is a case in which, I will take upon me to say, you cannot *demonstrate* the consequence to be necessary. For, as I presume I have shewn at large, there is not *actual contact* in *all* cases of seeming impulse,

and, therefore, the receding of one body from another, in those circumstances, is owing to a real *repulsion*, which we can no more resolve into a *mechanical effect*, than we can those of *gravity*, because they both take place at a distance from the bodies concerned.

Now, as it is simply in consequence of the observed *uniformity of the fact*, that I conclude a stone will fall to the ground, it is equally in consequence of the observed uniformity of the fact, that I conclude the determination of the mind will follow the motive. An inference from observation is surely as decisive in one case as in the other; and this is clearly independent of all consideration of the mind being material or immaterial.

### SECTION III.



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SECTION III.*Of Certainty and Necessity.*

**Y**OU seem sometimes willing to allow that the determination of the will may be *certain*, that is, a definite thing in definite circumstances, and yet you maintain that it is not *necessary*; so that the arguments in favour of liberty are not affected by the concession.

“The argument itself,” you say, p. 74,  
“may be resolved into this short question;  
“whether certainty implies necessity, or,  
“whether that which is morally certain, is,  
“therefore, physically necessary?” And, p. 23,  
“it is not the influence of motives, but their  
“necessary influence, that is denied.”

Now, this is a case that I had considered so fully in my late *Treatise*, in my *Correspondence with Dr. Price*, and in my *Letters to Dr. Horsley and Mr. Berington*, that I did not think I should have heard any more of it; and yet it seems you have read part, at least, of what I have advanced on that subject; for you say, p. 40, “The best reason that I can collect from all that the Doctor has advanced on this subject, in favour of such a physical connection respecting the operations of the mind, is the universality or certainty of the effects, that is, of the determination which takes place in any given circumstances. But though it be allowed that any particular effect would ever so certainly follow on a state of mind, and a situation of external objects corresponding with it, this will not prove the effect to be necessary. A moral certainty, and a physical necessity, or a necessity arising out of the nature of things, cannot but imply in them very different ideas; nor is the latter by any means the consequence of the former.”

You

You have, indeed, been able to collect, which was not difficult, (for I had occasion to repeat it several times) that, in favour of the *necessary* determination of the mind according to motives, I have urged the *certainty* and *universality* of such a determination; but I wonder you should not likewise have observed, that, in farther support of this, I added, that *certainty or universality is the only possible ground of concluding, that there is a necessity in any case whatever*; and to this, which you have not so much as noticed, you ought principally to have replied.

Please, Sir, to reflect a moment, and tell me distinctly, why you believe that there is a necessity that a stone must fall to the ground? Can it be any thing else than its having been observed that it *constantly* and *universally* does so? If, therefore, the determination follows the motives as certainly as a stone falls to the ground, there must be the very same reason to conclude, that, whether we see *why* it is so or not (which, indeed, we do not in the case of



the falling of the stone) there is a *necessity* for its doing so. The difference cannot be in the *reality*, but only in the *kind* of necessity. The necessity must be the same, or equally strict and absolute in both, let the *causes* of the necessity in the two be ever so different.

As I have told Dr. Horsley, but which you seem not to have attended to, (see *Correspondence with Dr. Price*, p. 223,) “ I will allow  
“ as much difference as you can between moral and physical causes. Inanimate matter, or *the pen* that I write with, is not capable of being influenced by motives, nor is the hand that directs the pen, but the mind that directs both. I think I distinguish these things better by the terms voluntary and involuntary, but these are mere words, and I make no comparison between them, or between moral and physical causes, but in that very respect in which you yourself acknowledge that they agree, *i. e.* the certainty with which they produce their respective effects. And this is the proper  
“ foundation

“ foundation of all the necessity that I ascribe  
“ to human actions. My conclusion, that men  
“ could not, in any given case, act otherwise  
“ than they do, is not at all affected by the  
“ *terms* by which we distinguish the laws and  
“ causes that respect the mind from those  
“ which respect the external world. That  
“ there are *any laws*, and that there are *any*  
“ *causes*, to which the mind is subject, is all  
“ that my argument requires. Give me the  
“ thing, and I will readily give you the name.”

“ If” (as I observed to Mr. Berington,  
*Treatise on Necessity*, p. 174,) “ the mind  
“ be, in fact, constantly determined by mo-  
“ tives, I desire you would say candidly why  
“ you object to the mere term *necessity*, by  
“ which nothing is ever meant but the *cause*  
“ *of constancy*. It is only because I see a stone  
“ fall to the ground constantly, that I in-  
“ fer it does so necessarily, or according to  
“ some fixed law of nature. And, please to  
“ say, whether you think it could happen,  
“ that the mind should be constantly deter-  
“ mined.

“mined by motives, if there was not a fixed  
“law of nature from which that constant de-  
“termination results.”

These passages, I presume, you have overlooked. You certainly have not noticed them, or given due attention to them.

You must give me leave to observe, on this subject of *moral certainty*, that you seem sometimes to have deceived yourself, by an ambiguous use of that term. Because we are apt to be deceived in our judgments concerning the sentiments and conduct of men, so that the greatest certainty we can attain to with respect to them is frequently imperfect, we distinguish it from *absolute certainty*, by calling it *moral*, and then apply the same term to other things, calling that a *moral certainty*, which is only a great *probability*. Thus, in the doctrine of chances, if there be a thousand to one in my favour, I say there is a moral certainty that I shall succeed. But it does not follow that, because the term *moral certainty* has



has by this means come to mean the same thing with a *high degree of probability*, nothing relating to the *mind* can have any thing more than a moral certainty, that is, a *probability*, attending it. Many propositions relating to the mind are as absolutely certain as any relating to the body. That the will constantly and invariably decides according to motives, must not, therefore, be concluded to have nothing more than a moral certainty attending it, merely because it is a truth relating to the *mind*, or to *morals*. It may be as absolutely certain as any truth in natural philosophy. It is the evidence of the *fact* that should be considered, and not the mere nominal distinctions of things.

For the farther illustration of this subject, I hope to satisfy you, that even all that you describe as most horrid and frightful in the doctrine of *necessity*, follows as evidently from your doctrine of *certainty*, provided it be a *real* certainty, though not such as you would chuse to call a *physical* one; and, therefore, that it  
can

can be nothing more than the mere *name* that you object to.

We will suppose that a child of yours has committed an offence, to which his mind was *certainly*, though *not necessarily*, determined by motives. He was not made, we will say, in such a manner as that motives had a *necessary* effect upon his mind, and *physically* or *mechanically* determined his actions, but only that his mind would in all cases *determine itself*, according to the same motives. You hear of the offence, and prepare for instant correction, not, however, on the idea that punishment is justifiable whenever it will reform the offender, or prevent the offences of others; but simply on your own idea, of its having been in the power of the moral agent to act otherwise than he had done.

Your son, aware of your principles, says, dear father, you ought not to be angry with me, or punish me, when you knew that I could not help doing as I have done. You  
placed

placed the apples within my reach, and knew that my fondness for them was irresistible. No, you reply, that is not a just state of the case, you were not under any *necessity* to take them, you were only so constituted as that you *certainly* would take them. But, says your son, what am I the better for this freedom from necessity? I wish I had been *necessarily* determined, for then you would not punish me; whereas now that I only *certainly* determine myself, I find that I offend just as much, and you always correct me for it.

A man must be peculiarly constituted, if, upon this poor distinction, he could satisfy himself with punishing his son in the one case, and not in the other. The offence he clearly foresaw would take place: for by the hypothesis, it was acknowledged to be *certain*, arising from his disposition and motives; and yet merely because he will not term it *necessary*, he thinks him a proper object of punishment. Besides, please to consider whether, if the child never *did* refrain from the offence

in



in those circumstances, there be any reason to think that he properly *could* have refrained. We judge of all *powers* only by their *effects*, and in all philosophy we conclude, that if any thing never *has* happened, and never *will* happen, there is a sufficient cause, though it may be unknown to us, why it never *could* happen. This is our only ground of concluding concerning what is possible or impossible in any case.

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#### SECTION IV.

*Of the Argument for the Doctrine of Necessity,  
from the Consideration of Divine Prescience.*

IF there be any proposition strictly *demonstrable*, it is, as it appears to me, that a *contingent event is no object of prescience*, or that a thing which, in its own nature, *may*,  
or

or *may not* be, cannot be certainly known to be future; for then it might be certainly known to be what it confessedly *may not be*. If, therefore, the mind of man be so constituted, as that any particular determination of his will may or may not take place, notwithstanding his previous circumstances, the Divine Being himself cannot tell whether that determination will take place or not. The thing itself is not subject to his controul, nor can be the object of his fore-knowledge.

To say, as you quote from some other person, p. 33, but without any declared approbation, that "fore-knowledge, if it does imply *certainty*, does yet by no means imply *necessity*, and that no other certainty is implied in it than such a certainty as would be equally in the things, though there was no fore-knowledge of them," is too trifling to deserve the least attention. You, therefore, in fact, give it up, and as, according to your system, the Divine Being cannot have this fore-knowledge, you take a good deal of  
pains

pains to shew that he may do very well without it.

“ Prescience,” you say, p. 31, “ is by no  
“ means essential to the government of free  
“ beings,—and a government of this na-  
“ ture, though prescience should be deemed  
“ inadmissible, as a contrariety to contin-  
“ gency in the event, may, notwithstand-  
“ ing, be as complete in its designs and ope-  
“ rations, as the utmost possible extent of  
“ knowledge, that is, the most perfect know-  
“ ledge united with almighty power, can  
“ make it.” This, however, in these cir-  
cumstances, may be very incomplete, and in-  
adequate for its purpose. You add, p. 30,  
“ it cannot be impossible to almighty power,  
“ when the characters of men are known,  
“ because really existing, to bring about by  
“ means, which, previous to their operation,  
“ we cannot foresee, those events which he  
“ judges fit, and proper, for the maintenance  
“ and promotion of the well-being of his  
“ rational creation. And, after all, whatever  
present



“ present irregularities may be permitted to  
“ take place in the allotments of Providence  
“ to the sons of men, the grand and ultimate  
“ part of the plan of God’s moral govern-  
“ ment, in the exact and equal distribution  
“ of rewards and punishments in a future  
“ scene of existence,—stands on the same  
“ firm and immovable grounds, whether  
“ the contingent actions of men be foreseen  
“ or not.”

This, and what you farther advance on the same subject, I really am not able to read without pain and concern. You say, p. 32, that “ the prophecies of scriptures do imply divine prescience in certain instances  
“ must be allowed.” Now, unable as you evidently are to defend the very *possibility* of this prescience, this concession is rather extraordinary. To be truly consistent, and, at the same time, a believer in revelation, you ought to assert, how embarrassed soever you might be in making out the proof of it, that

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there

there is no real fore-knowledge where a direct interference is not to be understood.

To lessen this difficulty, you say, p. 27, that, “ by denying that prescience to God, “ which is inconsistent with the idea of liberty or agency in man, we only deny that “ to belong to the supreme mind, which is, “ in truth, no perfection at all. For, if it be “ really impossible that even infinite knowledge should extend to actions or events in “ their own nature contingent, that is, where “ proper liberty or agency is supposed, we no “ more derogate from the perfection of the divine knowledge, by maintaining that God “ cannot know such actions or events, than we “ diminish his power by asserting that it cannot work contradictions, or what is really “ no object of power at all. Equally must “ it consist with the omniscience of the divine being, to say he cannot know that “ which is impossible to be known, as it “ does with his omnipotence to assert that he

“ he cannot do that which is impossible to  
“ be done.”

I should think, however, that it must be a matter of deep regret to the human race, that the object of our supreme veneration and worship, on whom we constantly depend for *life, breath, and all things*, should want such an attribute as that of *prescience*, though it should be impossible that he could be possessed of it. It would certainly be more satisfactory to us to be dependent upon a being who had planned, and provided for the whole course of our existence, before we came into being, than on one who could not tell what turn things would take with respect to us the next moment of our lives, and who must, therefore, either interpose by a proper miracle when we fall into any unforeseen misfortune, or leave us to struggle with it, and be overwhelmed by it.

It is certainly no reflection upon me that I cannot see into the table I write on, and discover



discover the internal texture of it; but I know that, as a philosopher, it would be a great perfection and advantage to me if I occasionally could.—I cannot help thinking that, with less ingenuity than you have employed to shew how the Divine Being might do without prescience, that is, without *omniscience*, you might prove that a power much short of *omnipotence*, and a degree of goodness much less than infinite, might suffice for him; and you might say it would be no reflection upon him at all to be less the object of love and reverence than we now conceive him to be. It can be no *detraction*, you might say, from any being, or *degradation*, to deny him what he never could have.

I rejoice that my opinions, whether true or false, oblige me to think with more reverence of the Supreme Being. It gives me a higher idea of my own dignity and importance, from a sense of my relation to him, and dependence upon him. You say, however, p. 216, that “the only character which the necessa-  
rian

" rian tenet, if considered in its due extent,  
 " will admit of, as belonging to the uncreated  
 " mind, is a mixed one, in which, if I may so  
 " speak, matchless virtues and matchless vices  
 " are blended together." And again, p. 188,  
 " he cannot but appear to be (horrid thought)  
 " the most sinful of all beings." *Horrid*  
*thought* indeed. But remember, it is not the  
 necessarian who has himself this idea of the  
 object of his worship. This is only what  
*you* think for him ; whereas it is yourself that  
 deprive the Divine Being of his prescience ;  
 which makes no small difference in the case.  
 It is of little consequence to me what *you*  
 think of the God that I worship, though it  
 hurts me to hear him reproached in this  
 manner. It is as little to you what *I* think  
 of him whom you, or any other person, pro-  
 fesses to worship; but what *we ourselves* think  
 of him is a very serious business.

Being aware of the impossibility of carry-  
 ing on a scheme of perfect moral government  
 on your principles, without having recourse

to a future state, you, however, make yourself easy about any irregularities that cannot be remedied here, on the idea that every thing that unavoidably goes wrong in this life, will be set to rights in another. But will not the same irregularities unavoidably arise from the same cause, the same self-determining power, in a future life as well as in this? You will hardly suppose that men will ever be deprived of a privilege which, in your estimation, is of so much importance to them. The nature of *man* will not be fundamentally changed, nor the nature of his *will*; and if this faculty retain the same character, it must be as much as ever perfectly uncontrolled either by the influence of motives, or by the deity himself. It will still, then, for reasons of its own, or for no reason at all, pay just as much or as little regard to every thing *foreign to itself*, as it pleases. Even *habits*, which may be acquired in this life, operate only as motives, or biases, inclining the mind to this or that choice, and nothing coming under that description has any decisive influence.

Here



Here is, therefore, from the unalterable nature of things, an everlasting source of irregularity, which must always be suffered for the present, and which can only be remedied in some future state. Thus periods of *disorder*, and periods of *rectification*, must succeed one another to all eternity. What a prospect does this view of things place before us !

You ask me, p. 33, “ how far it would be  
 “ agreeable to my ideas of civility and can-  
 “ dour, had any writer on the side of liberty,  
 “ under the warm impressions of an honest  
 “ zeal against the manifest tendency of my  
 “ *Illustrations of Philosophical Necessity*, adopted  
 “ the same satirical strain that I myself, in a  
 “ quotation you make from my treatise, used  
 “ with respect to Dr. Beattie,” and then you  
 proceed to parody my own words, inserting  
 my entire paragraph in a note.

“ Thus,” you say, p. 34, “ our author, in  
 “ the blind rage of disputation, hesitates not

“ to deprive the ever-blessed God of the  
“ possibility of creating, what in revelation  
“ is represented as the noblest of his works,  
“ a being formed in his own likeness, that is  
“ *intelligent*, and *free*; subverting that great  
“ principle of liberty, than which nothing  
“ can be more essential to every just idea  
“ of a moral government; which yet we are  
“ every where throughout the books of scrip-  
“ ture taught, that the deity constantly ex-  
“ ercises over mankind. This he has done  
“ rather than relinquish his fond attach-  
“ ment to the doctrines of materialism and  
“ necessity; doctrines which seem to draw  
“ after them an universal fatalism, through  
“ the whole extent of nature, and which, if  
“ really true, it must be unspeakably injurious  
“ both to the virtue and happiness of the ge-  
“ nerality of mankind to make public.”

I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity you  
have given me of trying how I should feel on  
this occasion. For, otherwise, we are so apt  
to overlook beams in our own eyes, while we  
can

can discover motes in the eyes of others, that I might not have attended to it; and I will tell you frankly how it is with me. Had I thought the reflection *just*, I should have felt it; though seeing it to proceed from an *honest zeal*, should not have thought it contrary to any thing that ought to be termed *civility*, or *candour*. But because I consider it as altogether founded on a mistake, I think it injurious to me, and unworthy of you.

I really suspect that neither you nor Dr. Beattie have sufficiently *attended to* the proofs of the divine prescience, either from reason or revelation. For they appear to me really stronger, and more strictly conclusive, than the arguments we have for his omnipotence or his infinite goodness; and the Divine Being himself proposes this as the very test and touchstone of *divinity itself*, so that a being not possessed of it is not, in a strict and proper sense, intitled to the appellation of *God*.—  
“Thus saith the Lord,” Isa. xli. 22, concerning idols, “Let them shew us what shall  
“ happen



“ happen. Let them shew the former things  
“ what they be, or declare us things to come.  
“ Let them shew the things that are to  
“ come hereafter, that we may know that they  
“ are Gods.”

This, I own, is *preaching* to one whose office it is to preach to others; but I must preach on, and observe, that if you will only attend to the amazing variety and extent of the scripture prophecies, comprizing the fate of all the great empires in the world, the very *minutiae* of the Jewish history, and all that is to befall the christian church to the very end of the world, you cannot entertain a doubt, but that every thought in the mind of every man (astonishing as the idea is) *must* have been distinctly perceived by the supreme ruler of all things from the beginning of the world.

You say, “ the prophecies of scripture imply prescience *in certain instances.*” This is greatly narrowing the matter, and giving an idea of it far below the truth. They not  
only

only *imply*, but directly *assert* it in *numberless instances*; and it is implied, I may say, in an infinity of instances. Consider only, for I think it very possible that you may never have attended to it at all (as your principles will naturally incline you to look another way) consider, I say, how many millions of human volitions must have taken place from the beginning of the world, that really (directly or indirectly) contributed to the *death of Christ*, in the *very peculiar circumstances* in which it was actually foretold; volitions which, according to all appearance (from which alone we are authorized to form any conclusion) were perfectly natural, and uncontrolled by supernatural influence; and you cannot think it extravagant to say, that all the volitions of the minds of all men must have been known to him that could foretel that one event, *in its proper circumstances*. Not only must he have foreseen the tempers and dispositions of the rulers and common people of the Jews, the peculiar character of Pilate, Herod, and of every man immediately concerned in the  
 transf-

transaction, and the peculiar manners and customs of the Romans, but all that had *prece-*  
*ded*, to give the Romans their power, and form their manners and customs, as well as those of the Jews and other nations. Think but a few minutes on the subject, and it will swell far beyond your power of conception, and overwhelm you with conviction. It impresses my mind in such a manner, that, I own, I cannot help being extremely shocked at the seeming *levity* with which you treat this most serious of all subjects.

Such is the evidence of the divine prescience from the consideration of the scripture prophecies, that, if they be duly considered, I do not think it in the power of the human mind to resist it; and without regard to any *consequences*, that metaphysical system which implies it, and is implied by it, *must be true*: And when the whole scheme is seen in its true colour and form, nothing can appear more admirable and glorious, more honourable to God, or more happy for man. But I will not  
enlarge



enlarge on the subject, though I can hardly forbear doing it.

Compared with this, how exceedingly low and poor must be their idea of the moral government of God, who hold him to have no fore-knowledge of the actions of men; and with what little satisfaction can they contemplate it? Only consider on that hypothesis, the millions, and millions 'of millions of volitions that take place every moment, on the face of this earth only, which the Divine Being, having no proper foresight of, cannot possibly control. For the mind of man is held to be as absolute, and uncontrolled, within its proper sphere, as the Divine Being is in his. The unknown effects of all these volitions he must always be anxiously watching, in order to remedy the inconveniencies that may arise from them as soon as possible; and he must have a distinct expedient provided for every contingency. What regularity or harmony can there be on such a scheme as this? What strange uncertainty, confusion,  
and

and perplexity, must reign every where ! I am unable to proceed any farther with the shocking picture. I thank God that such is not my idea of the government under which I really live.

To give our common readers an opportunity of judging of the paragraph which you think so obnoxious, and which you have taken care to bring into their view more than once, I shall myself recite the whole, with some things that precede and follow it.

“ Among other things, our author gently  
“ touches upon the objection to the contin-  
“ gency of human actions from the doctrine  
“ of the divine prescience. In answer to  
“ which, or rather in descanting upon which  
“ (thinking, I suppose, to chuse the less of  
“ two evils) he seems to make no great diffi-  
“ culty of rejecting that most essential prero-  
“ gative of the divine nature, though nothing  
“ can be more fully ascertained by indepen-  
“ dent evidence from revelation, rather than  
“ give

“ give up his darling hypothesis of human  
 “ liberty ; satisfying himself with observing,  
 “ that it implies no reflection on the divine power  
 “ that it cannot perform impossibilities. In the  
 “ very same manner he might make himself  
 “ perfectly easy if his hypothesis should com-  
 “ pel him to deny any other of the attributes  
 “ of God, or even his very being ; for what  
 “ reflection is it upon any person, or thing,  
 “ that things impossible cannot be ? Thus  
 “ our author, in the blind rage of disputa-  
 “ tion, hesitates not to deprive the ever-blessed  
 “ God of that very attribute, by which, in  
 “ the books of scripture, he expressly distin-  
 “ guishes himself from all false Gods, and  
 “ than which nothing can be more essentially  
 “ necessary to the government of the universe,  
 “ rather than relinquish his fond claim to the  
 “ fancied privilege of *self-determination* ; a  
 “ claim which appears to me to be just as  
 “ absurd as that of *self-existence*, and which  
 “ could not possibly do him any good if he  
 “ had it.

“ Terrified,



“ Terrified, however, as I am willing to  
“ suppose (though he does not express any  
“ such thing) at this consequence of his sys-  
“ tem, he thinks, with those who maintain  
“ a *trinity* of persons in the unity of the di-  
“ vine essence, and with those who assert  
“ the doctrine of *transubstantiation*, to shelter  
“ himself in the obscurity of his subject;  
“ saying, that *we cannot comprehend the*  
“ *manner in which the Divine Being operates.*  
“ But this refuge is equally untenable in  
“ all the cases, because the things them-  
“ selves are, in their own nature, impossi-  
“ ble, and imply a contradiction. I might  
“ just as well say that, though to us, whose  
“ understandings are so limited, *two* and *two*  
“ appear to make no more than *four*, yet  
“ in the divine mind, the comprehension of  
“ which is infinite, into which, however,  
“ we cannot look, and concerning which it  
“ is impossible, and even dangerous, to form  
“ conjectures, they may make *five*.”

“ Were

“ Were I possessed of Dr. Beattie’s talent  
“ of declamation, and had as little scruple to  
“ make use of it, what might I not say of  
“ the absurdity of this way of talking, and  
“ of the horrible immoral consequences of  
“ denying the fore-knowledge of God? I  
“ should soon make our author, and all his  
“ adherents, as black as Atheists. The very  
“ admission of so untractable a principle as  
“ *contingency* into the universe, would be no  
“ better than admitting the Manichæan doc-  
“ trine of *an independent evil principle*. Nay,  
“ it would be really of worse consequence,  
“ for the one might be controlled, but the  
“ other could not. But, I thank God, my  
“ principles are more generous, and I am as  
“ far from ascribing to Dr. Beattie all the  
“ real consequences of his doctrine (which,  
“ if he could see with my eyes, he would  
“ reprobate as heartily as I do myself) as I  
“ am from admitting his injurious imputati-  
“ ons with respect to mine.”

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I do

I do assure you, Sir, I see nothing to retract in all this, though it is in the first of my works in which I mentioned the subject of *Necessity*; and I do not at all envy you the discovery, that, for the purposes of the moral government of God, *fore-knowledge* is a superfluous attribute.

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## SECTION V.

### *Of the MORAL TENDENCY of the Doctrine of Necessity.*

IT is on the subject of the *moral tendency* of the doctrine of necessity, that you imagine your arguments the strongest, and that you declaim with the greatest warmth and confidence. To all this, however, I think it unnecessary for me to reply. For, notwithstanding all you have written on this favourite



yourite theme, I am perfectly satisfied with what I have already advanced, and think it altogether unaffected by your reply. Besides it behoves you, in the first place, to prove the doctrine to be false. For if it be true, the consequences will follow, and you, as well as myself, must make the best we can of them. And I beseech you, for your own sake, that you would not represent them as so very frightful, lest, after all, *they should prove true.*

In the mean time, have some little tenderness for *me*, and consider with what sentiments one who firmly believes the doctrine of necessity to be true, and at the same time to abound with the most glorious consequences, who imagines he feels it favourable to true elevation of mind, leading, in an eminent manner, to piety, benevolence, and self-government, must peruse the account you have been pleased to draw of his principles. The following are but a few of the features :

"I cannot but think," you say, p. 242,  
 "that the doctrine of necessity looks very  
 "much like a refinement on the old Mani-  
 "chæan notion of two independent princi-  
 "ples of good and evil, which, in this system,  
 "are blended in one." "I cannot but think,"  
 you say, p. 183, "such sentiments as danger-  
 "ous in their tendency, as they are false and  
 "absurd in themselves. They seem very ma-  
 "terially, though undesignedly, to affect the  
 "moral character of the deity, and to be big  
 "with consequences the most fatal to the  
 "virtue and happiness of mankind. I can-  
 "not but look upon the promulgation of the  
 "scheme of necessity," p. 175, "as highly  
 "exceptionable, because it is likely to do  
 "unspeakable mischief."

For my part, when I read such things as  
 these, I feel as I should do if I were charged  
 with being a negroe, or with having cloven  
 feet. I strip off my clothes, look at my skin,  
 and get my neighbours to look at it. I take  
 off

off my shoes, and see and feel my feet. But then finding myself of the same complexion with my neighbours, and formed as they are, I need not tell you what I think of my accuser.

Before you had concluded, as you have done, that the publication of the doctrine of necessity *must* do such unspeakable mischief to *the generality of mankind*, as you somewhere express yourself, you would have done well, I think (and in this I speak as a philosopher) to have consulted the Newgate Calendar, and have examined the state of executions since the promulgation of the scheme. You should also have enquired of the Ordinary what books the felons in general have been most fond of, and what system of metaphysics they have been most addicted to. The date of the promulgation of these principles is old enough for a pretty fair *experiment* of this curious kind.



If the world is not *yet* turned upside down with murders and robberies, let us flatter ourselves that it may stand a while longer, and that the doctrine of necessity, if it be a *poison*, is, however, a slow if not an uncertain one; that not my constitution alone, as you charitably suppose, but even that *of the generality of mankind*, is strong enough to resist it,

Grave as the subject naturally is, yet your manner of considering it is such, that I cannot help treating it with some degree of pleasantry. However, I shall now treat your serious accusations with the gravity that yourself will think them intitled to; and I think I may undertake to satisfy you, from your own mode of arguing, that there is nothing whatever to be apprehended from the doctrine of necessity, but, on the contrary, the greatest good, and that you evidently argue on principles inconsistent with each other when you throw so much odium on the scheme.

In

In the first place, you say, p. 149, that  
“on the scheme of necessity all is resolved  
“into a divine constitution, which is unal-  
“terably fixed. If any, therefore, are to  
“succeed better, or be happier, in any part  
“of their existence than others, their supe-  
“rior prosperity and happiness will be infal-  
“libly secured to them; and though there  
“is a certain disposition of mind, and course  
“of action, which are inseparably connected  
“with their success and happiness, as means  
“to bring about those events, yet the means  
“as well as the end are alike necessary; and  
“having no power to make either the one  
“or the other at all different from what  
“they are, or are to be, their lot, through  
“the whole of their being, is by them abso-  
“lutely unalterable. What, again, I say,  
“can have a stronger tendency to relax the  
“mind, and sink it into a state of indolence  
“and inactivity?”

Here then you reduce the necessarian to a  
state of absolute *inactivity*, that is, indisposed

to *any pursuits*, virtuous or vicious. For your argument, if it goes to any thing, goes to both alike.

But, on the other hand, you constantly suppose, so that I have no occasion to quote particular passages, that the necessarian will, of course, give himself up to the gratification of all his passions, and pursue without restraint whatever he apprehends to be his interest or happiness.

Here then, notwithstanding the natural *indolence* of the necessarian, you are able, when your argument requires it, to find a considerable source of *activity* in him; because you have discovered, that, like other men, he has *passions*, and a *regard to his interest and happiness*.

But, surely, it is not difficult to conceive, that this activity, from whatever source it arises, may take a good as well as a bad turn, and lead to virtue or vice, according as it is directed.



directed. If the gratification of our lower appetites leads to evil, the gratification of the higher ones, as benevolence, &c. (of which, I hope, you will admit that a necessarian, being a man in other respects, may be possessed) must lead to good; and that, if false notions of interest and happiness instigate a man to vice, just notions of his interest and happiness must lead to virtue. In fact, therefore, upon your own principles, nothing is requisite to convert even a necessarian from vice to virtue, but the better informing his understanding and judgment, which you expressly allow to be mechanical things, being always determined by a view of the objects presented to them, and to have nothing of self-determination belonging to them.

This, if there be any force in your own reasoning, must be a sufficient answer to every thing that you so pathetically and repeatedly urge concerning the mischiefs to be dreaded from the doctrine of necessity. It  
would

would be very disagreeable to me to go over all that you say on this subject, and, therefore, I am glad to find that I have no occasion to do it.

I am sorry to find that, in pursuing your supposed advantage so inconsiderately as you do, you, in fact, plead the cause of vice, and represent it as triumphing over every consideration drawn from the present or a future state. "How is a vicious man," you say, p. 185, "who finds that the present  
"natural good of pleasure or profit results  
"from the gratification of his appetites,  
"and from defrauding or over-reaching his  
"neighbour, to be persuaded to think that  
"vice is productive of evil to him here? On  
"the supposition that there is no moral difference in things, all moral arguments  
"against the course of conduct to which his  
"appetites or inclinations prompt him, immediately vanish. As long, therefore, as  
"he can make his present conduct consistent  
"with what is his natural good, or which  
"he

“ he looks upon to be so, that is, with sensitive pleasure, or his worldly advantage, all is right and well, so far as regards the present scene of things.”

Now I am really surprized that you, who have been so long a preacher, could not, on this occasion, recollect any thing in answer to such a libertine as this, without having recourse to arguments drawn from a future state, and even independent of moral considerations, of which it is but too apparent that mere sensualists and worldly-minded persons make little account. Do no evils arise to the bodily constitution, to the mental faculties, or to society, from habitual excess in eating or drinking, or from the irregular indulgence of other natural appetites? And short of excess we are within the bounds of virtue; for in fact, nothing is ever properly termed excess, but what does terminate (and it is so called because it terminates) in pain and misery. Is it not possible that a man may both shorten his life, and make his  
short



short life miserable, by his vices? Only re-peruse your own excellent sermon, intituled, *The insanity of the Sensualist*, written long before this controversy, and you will find many valuable observations to this purpose.

Supposing conscience entirely out of the question, are injustice and oppression always successful, and are there not many proverbs founded on general experience, teaching even the vulgar, in a variety of expression, that, some how or other, ill-gotten wealth does not contribute to happiness? Or, exclusive of the natural course of things, are there no such things as laws and magistrates in human society? Are there no gallows, gibbets, or wheels, to which flagrant wickedness may bring a man? Now may not a necessarian see the necessary connection of these *natural evils* with a course of vicious indulgence, as well as any other person; and, fully apprehending this, can he pursue the one without chusing his own destruction, of which I fancy you will allow that he is just as incapable as any person whatever. Besides,

Besides, it is very unfair to say that because a necessarian considers those things which are generally termed *moral*, as coming ultimately under the same description with things *natural*, that, therefore, he believes there are no such things at all. You well know that he does not consider these things as at all the less *real*, though, as a philosopher, he chuses to give them another name. A sense of right and wrong, the stings of conscience, &c. (which, however, will not, in general, be so much felt by those who believe no future state) are things that actually exist, by whatever names they be signified, and will be felt in a greater or less degree by the most hardened transgressor.

Dr. Hartley and myself have endeavoured to shew that the peculiar feeling of *remorse*, arising from ascribing our actions to ourselves, can never vanish, or cease to influence us, till we arrive at such a comprehension of mind, as will enable us habitually to ascribe every thing to God, and that when  
we

we are arrived at this state, we shall live in communion with God, and shall stand in no need of such a motive to virtue. Before this period, let a man be speculatively a necessarian, or whatever he will, and let him pretend what he pleases, it will be *naturally impossible* for him not to feel all the pungency of remorse, whenever even yourself would say that he ought to feel it. You must invalidate our reasoning on this subject, from the consideration of the nature of the human mind, before you can make it appear that a necessarian, *as such*, will be a bad man. But as you lay so very much stress on this subject of remorse of conscience, I will discuss the matter a little farther with you.

You say that remorse of conscience implies that a man thinks he could have acted otherwise than he did. I have no objection to admit this, at the same time, that I say he deceives himself in that supposition. I believe, however, there are few persons, even those who blame themselves with the greatest



est pungency, but, if they will reflect, will acknowledge, that in so supposing, they leave out the consideration of the situation they were in at the time of the transaction, and that with the same disposition of mind that they had then, and the same motives, they should certainly have acted the same part over again; but that having, since that time, acquired a different disposition, and different views of things, they unawares carry them back, and consider how they would have acted with their present acquired dispositions. However, their disposition being really altered by what has occurred to them since, they would not *now* act the same part over again, and therefore, all the proper ends of remorse are sufficiently answered.

If you say that the peculiar feeling of remorse is founded on a mistake, I answer, so are the peculiar feelings of anger in most cases, and likewise the peculiar feelings of all our passions, and that a philosopher, who should have strength of mind to consider his situation,

situation, would do the same things coolly and effectually without that *stimulus*, that the vulgar do with it. He would punish an offender without anger, and he would reform his own conduct without remorse. But neither you nor myself, necessarian as I am, can pretend to this degree of perfection. It is acquired by experience; and the firmest belief of the doctrine of necessity can only accelerate our progress towards it to a certain degree. All this I have endeavoured to explain in my *Additional Illustrations*, but you have not noticed it.

What you say of the little influence of the motives to virtue which the necessarian can draw from the consideration of a *future life*, by no means concerns the necessarian as such. "In relation to futurity," you say, p. 185, "it is naturally to be supposed, that a man "of this disposition" (*i. e.* a vicious necessarian) "will not concern himself about it, or "if he does, his necessarian principle, by "holding up to his view his future moral  
"good

“ good or happiness, as secured to him by  
“ his omnipotent Creator, will lead him ha-  
“ stily to pass over all intermediate sufferings  
“ with which he is threatened, how long or  
“ severe soever, considering them only as na-  
“ tural evils, which he can no more avoid  
“ than the course of action which is connected  
“ with them.”

You know very well that they are not necessarians only who believe, that all the sufferings of a future life are corrective, and will terminate in the reformation of those who are exposed to them. And a man must not be a necessarian, but the reverse of one, and the reverse of every thing that *man* is, before he can be made to slight the consideration either of present or future evils, especially long and severe ones, provided he really believes them, and gives proper attention to them. But with this *belief* and *attention* they cannot but influence any man who regards his own happiness, and who believes the inseparable connection between virtue

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and happiness (which no man believes more firmly than the necessarian) to have recourse to a life of virtue, as the only road to happiness, here or hereafter. And having, from whatever motive, begun to tread this path, he will persist in it from a variety of other and better principles.

That you should prefer the Calvinistic doctrine of *eternal punishments*, horrible as you say it is, to that of *universal restoration* to virtue and happiness, could surely be dictated by nothing but your abhorrence of the doctrine of necessity in general, to which it is usually, but not necessarily, an appendage. "I cannot but be of opinion," you say, p. 239, "that the persuasion of the final  
" restoration of all the wicked to virtue and  
" happiness, which it" (the doctrine of necessity) " supports, will, in its natural operation, have a very pernicious influence on  
" the unsettled minds of the generality of  
" mankind: while the doctrine of eternal remediless torments for the non-elect, taught  
" by

“ by Calvinism, horrible as it is in itself,  
 “ may, in the way of restraint, have a con-  
 “ siderable effect, and in some instances may  
 “ probably produce an external reformation  
 “ of life.”

You may just as well say, that a civil magistrate who punishes without reason, mercy, or bounds, will be more respected than an equitable judge, who exacts an adequate punishment for every offence. Besides, the doctrine of eternal punishments for the offences of a short life is so very absurd, that it must ever be attended with a secret incredulity. At least, a man, though wicked, yet thinking he does not deserve the everlasting pains of hell, will not believe that he shall be sent thither, and therefore will indulge a notion that he shall go to heaven, and escape punishment altogether. But I need not argue this point, as it does not belong to me as a necessarian to do it. I have already argued <sup>it</sup> in my *Institutes of natural and revealed Religion*.

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SECTION VI.

*What makes Actions a MAN'S OWN, and  
DEPENDING ON HIMSELF.*

TO what I have already advanced in reply to your remarks on the moral influence of the doctrine of necessity, and the comparison of it with the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, I shall add, in a separate section, some considerations on men's actions as *depending on themselves*, and being *their own*, on which you lay so much stress, and which runs through your whole book. Now I am confident that, in what you say on this subject, you deceive yourself by the use of words, or you could not draw the consequences that you do from what you suppose to be my doctrine on this subject.

Strictly



Strictly and philosophically speaking, my success in any thing I wish to accomplish, depends upon myself, if my own exertions and actions are necessary links in that chain of events by which alone it can be brought about. And, certainly, if I do know this, and the object or end be desirable to me, this desire (if it be of sufficient strength) cannot but produce the exertion that is necessary to gain my end. This reasoning appears to me extremely easy, and perfectly conclusive, and yet, though I have repeated it several times, and have placed it in a variety of lights, you do not seem to have considered it. I shall, therefore, give another instance, and add some farther illustrations.

Can I have a sufficiently strong wish to answer your book, and not of course read it, mark proper extracts from it, arrange them, write my remarks upon them, then transcribe them for the press, and put them into the hands of a bookseller or printer, &c. when I know, that if all this be not done, the book

will never be answered? Surely my firm belief that all these things are necessarily connected, must convince me of the necessity of setting about the work, if I wish to do it at all; and my *wish* to have it done is here to be supposed, as having arisen from a variety of previous circumstances.

If, therefore, I shall certainly find myself disposed to act just as I now do, believing my actions to be necessary, your objection to my doctrine on this account cannot have a sufficient foundation. You say, that if the thing *must be*, it *must be*; if your book *is to be* answered by me, it *will be* answered by me; and that I may, therefore, make myself easy about it, and do nothing. I answer, that so I should, either if I had no desire to have it done, which happens not to be the case, or if I thought that no exertions of mine were necessary to gain my end, which is not the case neither. On this consideration depends the capital distinction that I make between  
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the doctrines of philosophical necessity and Calvinistic predestination.

The Calvinists make the work of conversion to be wholly of God's free and sovereign grace, independent of every thing in the person thus regenerated or renovated, and to which he cannot in the least contribute. In this work, they say, God is the sole agent, and men altogether passive; that both to *will* and to *do* is of God's pleasure; and so much so, that without his immediate agency, to which nothing on the part of man can contribute, let a man exert himself ever so much, in the use of all possible means, yet all his volitions and all his actions would be only sinful, and deserving of the wrath and curse of God to all eternity.

In this case I do not see what a man can have to do, because his doing, or his not doing, is equally unconnected with the end he has in view. But this is the very reverse of the doctrine of philosophical necessity, which



supposes a necessary connection between our endeavours and our success; so that if only the *desire of success*, the first link in this chain, be sufficiently strong, all the rest will follow of course, and the end will be certainly accomplished.

According to the Calvinists, there may be the most earnest desire, without a man's being at all the nearer to his end, because the *desire* and the *end* have no necessary connection, by means of intermediate links, as we may say, in the chain that joins them.

It is on this ground that Dr. Hartley justly supposes that the doctrine of necessity has a tendency to make men exert themselves, which he makes the fifth advantage attending the scheme. "It has a tendency," he says, p. 344, of my edition, "to make us labour more earnestly with ourselves and others, particularly children, from the greater certainty attending all endeavours that operate in a mechanical way."

Another

Another of your arguments relating to this subject, I really cannot treat with so much seriousness as you will probably expect. I shall not, however, dwell long upon it, and with this I shall close the section.

I had observed, that a volition may be termed *mine*, if it takes place in my mind. Animadverting on this, you say, p. 80, "Can  
" that be truly said to be my volition, my act,  
" which is produced by something over  
" which I had no power. On that ground  
" every thing that takes place in my body,  
" as well as in my mind, may with equal  
" propriety be called my act or volition;—  
" and so the circulation of the blood, and  
" the pulsation of the heart, may with equal  
" reason be called my volitions."

Now, Sir, is not *judgment* always called an *act of the mind*, as well as volition? But has any man power over this? Is not this necessarily determined by the view of arguments, &c.? You will not deny it. Does it  
not,

not, therefore, follow, on your own principles, that whatever passes in your body, as well as in your mind, may with equal propriety be called an act of your judgment;—and so the circulation of your blood, and the pulsation of your heart, may with equal reason be called your *judgment*. But the very same things were before proved to be *volitions*. *Ergo*, *judgments* and *volitions* are the same things. By the same mode of reasoning, it would be easy to prove your head to be your feet, and your feet your head, and both of them to be the same with your understanding, or any thing else belonging to you.

SECTION



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SECTION VII.

*Of the proper Object of this Controversy, and  
a summary View of the principal Sources of  
Mistake with respect to it.*

AS I take it for granted you would not have engaged in this controversy, especially after a person for whom you profess so great an esteem as Dr. Price, without thinking you felt yourself fully equal to it, and without being determined to see it fairly out, I shall take the liberty, which I hope you will also do with respect to me, (that we may save ourselves as much trouble as possible) to point out what I think will be of use to us in conducting it. And in doing this, I shall purposely go over some of the ground I have already trod, but in a different direction,

direction, hoping that different views of the same objects may be both pleasing and useful.

In general, I think, we shall do well to consider things as much as possible *without the use of words*, at least such words as are, on either side, charged with being the causes of mistake. I shall treat of the principal of them separately.

*1st. Of the Term AGENT.*

IN the farther prosecution of this debate, do not begin, as you have done now, with assuming that man, in consequence of having a power of choice, is an *agent*, and that being an agent, he cannot be a mere passive being, acted upon by motives, &c. but must be possessed of a power of proper self-determination. In fact, this is no better than taking for granted the very thing in dispute, and therefore you might as well, with Dr. Beattie, disclaim all *reasoning* on the subject, and assert your liberty on the footing of *common sense*, or *instinct* only.

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The only unexceptionable method is, to attend to the real *phenomena of human nature*, and to consider the known actions of men in known situations, in order to determine whether our volitions, which precede all our actions, and direct them, be not always *definite in definite circumstances*. If you admit this, and I think it almost impossible not to admit it, you admit all that I contend for; because it will then follow, that from a man's birth to his death, there is an unalterable chain of *situations and volitions*, invariably depending on one another. Your saying that, if this be the case, man is no *agent*, will avail nothing; for if that word imply more than the actual phenomena will authorize, the agency of man, in that sense of the word, flattering as it may sound, must be given up.

Dr. Price does, in fact, allow that men's volitions are definite in definite circumstances, for he says it is the greatest absurdity to suppose that men ever act either without or against motives, but that the self-determining



ing power is wanted only when the motives are equal ; which, considering how very seldom this can be supposed to be the case, reduces this boasted liberty of man, in my opinion, to a very small matter, hardly worth contending for.

In this you differ from him. For you carefully avoid making that concession, and always, at least generally, suppose the mind capable of acting contrary to any motive whatever. But then you will do well to consider whether, consistently with the phenomena, Dr. Price could avoid making that concession, alarming as you may think it; and whether it be probable that, in fact, men ever do act either without, or contrary to motives. And if he never *does*, you will not easily prove that he *can*.

If man be an agent, in your sense of the word, that is, if his will be properly *self-determined*, you must shew that nothing foreign to the will itself, nothing that can come  
under

under the description of *motive*, or the circumstances in which the mind is, regularly precedes the determination. For if any such foreign circumstances, any thing that is not *mere will*, does constantly precede every determination, we are certainly authorized, by the established rules of philosophizing, to consider these circumstances as the proper causes of the determination, and may, therefore, say that the will is influenced or acted upon by them, and so, going backwards in the same train, we shall conclude that there can be no more than one proper agent in the universe.

## 2. *Of Responsibility.*

LET us likewise consider the nature and use of *moral government*, as much as possible, without the use of such words as *responsibility*, *praise*, *blame*, &c. and only consider how a wise governor would treat beings whose wills should be invariably influenced by motives; and if the proper ends of government would,

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in fact, be answered by annexing happiness to such actions as we call virtuous, and misery to such as we call vicious, (so that every thing we now see or expect would be done) it will follow, that, for any thing that appears to the contrary, we *may* be so constituted. If the word *responsibility*, as you arbitrarily define it, will not apply to such a system, it ought to be discarded from the language of philosophers.

Take the same course with the words *merit* and *demerit*, *virtue* and *vice*, &c. and on this subject, attend particularly to what Dr. Hartley, in a very short compass, most excellently observes. "It may be said," says he, p. 343, "that the denial of free will  
"destroys the distinction between virtue and  
"vice. I answer, that this is according as  
"these words are defined. If free will be  
"included in the definition of virtue, then  
"there can be no virtue without free will.  
"But if virtue be defined *obedience to the will*  
"of God, a course of action proceeding from the  
"love



“ love of God, or from benevolence, &c. free  
“ will is not at all necessary; since these af-  
“ fections and actions may be brought about  
“ mechanically.

“ A solution analogous to this may be  
“ given to the objection from the notions of  
“ merit and demerit. Let the words be de-  
“ fined, and they will either include free  
“ will, or, not including it, will not require  
“ it; so that the proposition, *merit implies free*  
“ *will*, will either be identical or false.”

In all that you have said on the subject of responsibility, you take your own principles for granted, and then it can be no wonder that all your conclusions follow. You make it essential to responsibility that man has a power, independent of his disposition of mind at the particular time, and of all motives, of acting otherwise than he did, and you take not the least notice of what I have advanced on that subject in the *Correspondence with Dr. Price*, p. 150, &c. where I show that, not-

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withstanding

withstanding it be not in the power of moral agents to act otherwise than they do, yet that a moral governor, who consults the good of his subjects (whose minds and whose conduct he knows to be influenced by motives) must treat them in the very same manner that you yourself acknowledge he ought to do. He will apply suffering with propriety, and, with good effect in any case in which the apprehension of it will so impress the minds of his subjects, offenders and others, as to influence their wills to right conduct. So that, as I have observed, p. 151, “ though the vulgar and philosophers may use different language, they “ will always see reason to act in the very “ same manner. The *governor* will rule voluntary agents by means of rewards and “ punishments; and the *governed*, being voluntary agents, will be influenced by the “ apprehension of them. It is consequently “ a matter of indifference in what language “ we describe actions and characters.” This you should have particularly considered and have replied to. You must not tell me what  
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the word *responsibility* requires; but you must show that, supposing men to be what I suppose them, the supreme ruler ought to have treated them otherwise than he actually has done. If not, every fact exactly corresponds with my hypothesis, and then on what can your objection be founded, except on something that is merely verbal.

3. *Of the Prejudice arising from the terms*  
 MACHINE and NECESSITY.

YOU mislead and deceive yourself, I am persuaded, not a little, by the frequent use of the opprobrious term *machine*, saying, in the first place that, because a man wills *necessarily*, that is, definitely in definite circumstances, he wills *mechanically*; and then having made a man into a *machine*, you, unknown to yourself, connect with it every thing opprobrious and degrading belonging to a common clock, or a fulling-mill.



But you might easily correct this by only considering what you yourself allow to be necessary relating to the mind of man, viz. *perception* and *judgment*. Is there not something inconceivably more excellent in these powers than in those of common machines, or mills, and even something that bears no resemblance to any thing belonging to them, though they all agree in this one circumstance, that their respective affections are necessary? Now suffer your mind to be sufficiently impressed with the wonderful nature and excellence of the powers of *perception* and *judgment*, and you cannot think the *will* at all degraded by being put on a level with them, even in the same respect in which they all agree with any common machine, or a mill, viz. that all its affections are definite in definite circumstances, though this property be best expressed by the term *necessary*.

If you suffer your mind to be affected by such prejudices as these, you may decline  
applying

applying the term *substance* to the mind, because it is likewise applied to wood and stone, and oblige yourself to invent some other term by which to distinguish it from them.

With respect to the Divine Being, you will not scruple to say, that his actions are always definite in definite circumstances, and if you decline applying the term *necessary* to them, it is only because you conceive that it implies something more than *definite in definite circumstances*, whereas the two phrases are perfectly synonymous, and it is nothing but the word that you can dislike. The *reasons* why we say that any affection or action is necessary, and why it is definite in definite circumstances, are the very same, and cannot be distinguished in the mind. It is the *constant observation of its taking place in those circumstances*,

It is because we see that a clock always strikes when the hands are in certain posi-

ons, that we conclude it always *will* do so, and, therefore, *necessarily must* do so, or that (whether it be known or unknown to us) there is a *cause* why it cannot be otherwise. Now, can you help applying this mode of reasoning, and, consequently, this phraseology, to the mind, and even the divine mind, and, at the same time, be free from weak and unworthy prejudices? For, if the will cannot act but when motives are present to it, and if it always determines definitely in definite circumstances with respect to motives, you cannot but conclude that there is a sufficient reason, known or unknown to you, why it *must* be so, and you can have no reason to suppose that it ever can be otherwise. And, in this case, whether you scruple to say, that such a determination can be called *action*, or be said to be *necessary*, your ideas of the things are the same. If any thing always *will* be so, there can be no good reason why we should scruple to say that it *must*, and *must necessarily* be so.

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The Divine Being, you will allow, notwithstanding the incomprehensibility of his nature, always acts definitely in definite circumstances. It would be a weakness and imperfection to do otherwise. In fact, it is no more a degradation of him to say that he acts *necessarily*, than that his essence may be termed *substance*, or *being*, in common with that of the human mind, or even that of wood and stone.

You will say, and justly enough, that this observation applies to the Divine Being only as *actually existing*, and *operating*; and that originally, and before the creation, when there were no external circumstances by which his actions could be determined, his volitions must have been, in the proper and strict philosophical sense of the word, *free*. But then there never can have been a time, to which that observation applies, because there never can have been any time in which the Deity did not *exist*, and consequently *act*.

For, supposing him not to have been employed in creation, &c. (which, however, I think we can hardly avoid supposing) he must at least have *thought*, and *thinking*, you will not deny to be the acting of the mind. The origin of action, therefore, in your sense of the word, that is, the origin of self-determination, is the same as the origin of the Deity, concerning which we know nothing at all.

Besides, how can you, or any of Dr. Clark's admirers, think it any degradation to the Deity, that he should *act* necessarily, when you allow that he *exists* necessarily? Is not the term just as opprobrious in the one case as in the other? Nay, might it not rather be supposed, by analogy, that the actions of the being whose existence is necessary, must be necessary too. With respect to your notion of dignity and honour, I would ask, Is not the *existence* of any being or thing, of as much importance to him, as his *acting*? Is not

not then his being subject to necessity as great a reflection upon him in the former case as in the latter? In short, every thing that you consider as *degrading* and *vilifying* in man, on account of his being subject to necessity, in his existence or actions, might, if I were disposed to retort so trifling and mistaken a consideration, be applied to the Divine Being himself. What I now observe is only to take off the force of your prejudice against the doctrine of necessity, on account of its exhibiting man, as you suppose, in a degrading and unimportant light.



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## THE CONCLUSION.

DEAR SIR,

**I** HAVE now gone over all the topicks that I think of much importance to discuss with you. I might have taken a much larger compass; but I was unwilling to take in more objects than such as I thought I might possibly throw some new light upon. As to what you say concerning the doctrine of the scriptures, and several other articles, I leave the field open to you, being fully satisfied with what I have already advanced, and having nothing material to add to it.

You will probably think there is an appearance of *arrogance* in the tone of this letter.

ter. But in this, I think, you will do me injustice ; my manner of writing being nothing more than what necessarily arises from the fullness of my persuasion concerning the truth and importance of the doctrine I contend for ; and this, I think, is not greater than your own. But in this I must appeal to indifferent persons, if any such there be, who will give themselves the trouble to read what we have written.

We all see *some things* in so clear and strong a light, that, without having any high opinion of our own understandings, we think we may challenge all the world upon them. Such all persons will think to be most of the propositions of Euclid, and such, I dare say, with you are many tenets in theology. You would not hesitate, I presume, to maintain that *bread and wine* cannot be *flesh and blood*, against even a Bossuet, or a Thomas Aquinas, than whom, it is probable, the world never produced a greater man ; and that *three persons*,

*sons*, each possessed of all the attributes of God, must make more in number than *one God*, against all the divines that the three churches of Rome, England, and Scotland, could name to hold the disputation with you. And, though it should be deemed, as by them it certainly would be, the height of arrogance in you to hold out this challenge, it would not give you any disturbance; nor, in fact, would you think very highly of yourself, though you should gain a decided victory in such a contest.

Now, this happens to be my case with respect to the doctrine of Necessity. I really think it the clearest of all questions, the truth of it being as indubitable as that the three angles of a right-lined triangle are equal to two right angles, or that *two* and *two* make *four*, and, therefore, I have no feeling either of *fear* or *arrogance*, in challenging the whole world in the defence of it. This argument I compare to such ground as one man may defend



defend against an army. It is, therefore, absolutely indifferent to me by *whom*, or by *how many*, I be assailed. You would, probably, say the same with respect to the doctrine of Liberty, at least the style in which your book is written seems to speak as much; and yet I by no means think you deficient in modesty, any more than I do in understanding and ability. I only wish, therefore, that, notwithstanding the confidence with which I have written, you would put the same candid construction on my conduct, that I do on yours.

I make allowance for our difference of opinion, on account of the different lights in which we happen to see things, or in which they have been represented to us; nor do I at all expect that any thing I have now advanced, or am capable of advancing, will make the least change in your view of things. A change in things of so much moment, which would draw after it a thousand other changes,

changes, is not to be expected either in you or myself, who are both of us turned forty, and who were, I suppose, metaphysicians before twenty. Judging of ourselves by other men, we must conclude that our present *general system of opinions*, whether right or wrong, is that which we shall carry to our graves. Those who are younger than we are, and whose principles are not yet formed, are alone capable of judging between us, and of forming their opinions accordingly; and in that respect, they may derive an advantage from these publications that we cannot derive from them ourselves.

We see every day such instances of *confirmed judgments* in things of the greatest, as well as of the least moment, as ought to make the most confident of us to pause, though every man is necessarily determined by his own view of the evidence that is before him. I am well aware that, let me place the evidence for the doctrine of necessity in the  
strongest

strongest and clearest light that I possibly can, arguing either from the nature of the will, observations on human life, or the consideration of the divine prescience; let me describe the doctrine of imaginary liberty as a thing ever so absurd, and impossible in itself, as totally foreign to, and inconsistent with all principles of just and moral government, and supplying no foundation whatever for praise or blame, reward or punishment; the generality of my readers will never get beyond the very threshold of the business. They will still say, "Are we not conscious of our freedom, cannot we do whatever we please; sit still, walk about, converse, or write, just as we are disposed?" and they will fancy that all my reasoning, plausible as it may seem, cannot, in fact, deserve any attention; and even though they should be silenced by it, they will not be the nearer to being convinced.

But just so we see it to be in politics. Let such writers as Dr. Price explain ever so clearly



clearly the injustice of taxing any people without their consent, shewing that the same power that can compel the payment of one penny, may compel the payment of the last penny they have, and that a foreign people or nation, easing themselves by laying the burthen upon others, will be disposed to proceed as far as possible in this way; still he will never satisfy many persons of landed property in this country, who will answer all he can say by one short argument, the force of which they feel and comprehend, saying, "What, shall we pay taxes, and the Americans none?" The Doctor may repeat his arguments, and exhibit them in every possible light, he will get no sufficient attention to them from a person whose whole mind is occupied with the *single idea*, of his paying taxes, and the Americans paying none.

Notwithstanding, therefore, all that I shall ever be able to write in favour of the doctrine of necessity, your supposed *consciousness of liberty*,

*liberty*, and other popular arguments (though when analysed, they really make against your hypothesis) will always secure you *nine* out of *ten* of the generality of our readers. All that I can do must be to make the most of my *tenth man*; and, if I possibly can, fancy his suffrage equivalent to that of your nine. And to allay your fears of another kind, be assured that this tenth man will generally be of so *quiet* and *speculative* a turn, that you need be under no apprehension of his engaging in riots or rebellions. He will neither murder you in your bed, nor subvert the state.

I think, therefore, now that I have advanced, I verily believe, all that I can, in support of my opinion, I ought to acquiesce in the success of my labours, be it more or less. I see nothing *new* in any thing that you have advanced, and you will see nothing new, at least more forcible, in this reply. I do not, however, make any fixed resolutions.

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If you make a *rejoinder*, as I think you *ought*, and will be advised to do, I, true to my principles as a necessarian, *shall act as circumstances shall determine me.*

I am, with much respect,

DEAR SIR,

Your's sincerely,

J. PRIESTLEY.

Calne, Aug. 1779.

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